

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**LAND RECONSTRUCTION, ABANDONED MINED LAND**

(Acres)  
**CODE 543**

**DEFINITION**

Restoring land and water areas that are adversely affected by past mining practices increasing the productivity of the areas for a beneficial use.

**PURPOSE**

- Stabilize mined areas so that they can be used to support desirable vegetation.
- Reduce erosion and sedimentation.
- Enhance water quality or quantity.
- Maintain or improve the visual quality of the landscape.
- Protect public health, safety and general welfare.
- To reduce airborne particulate matter.
- Improve soil quality and sequester carbon.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

On abandoned mined land that degrades quality of the environment, prevents or interferes with the beneficial use of land or water and air resources, or endangers the health or safety of individuals.

The standard applies to the construction, grading, and reshaping of land that has been disturbed or adversely affected by past mining of all minerals and commodities.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

Reconstruction plans must comply with all local, state and federal laws and regulations relating to mining and reclamation.

Land reconstruction on abandoned mined lands shall include the components necessary to reclaim and stabilize the area and prevent further degradation of air, water, soil and plant resources. The system may consist of one or two components such as Fire Control (451) and Toxic Discharge Control (455). Traditional practices such as terraces, grade stabilization structures and critical area treatment components shall be used as appropriate.

**Dust Control.** The generation of particulate matter and fugitive dust shall be controlled when moving soil and other earthy materials by controlling vehicular and pedestrian traffic; and when appropriate, by modifying soil moisture content. Temporary vegetation shall be established, as needed, on disturbed soils.

Earth moving activities shall be restricted or stopped when wind direction and velocity could allow particulate matter and dust to impair the visibility on roads downwind from the construction area.

**Site Preparation.** Areas to be graded shall be cleared of trees, logs, brush, rubbish and other undesirable materials that can prevent proper application of the practice. These materials shall be disposed of in a manner that precludes interference with water disposal practices, stabilization operations, or the operations associated with the planned use of the land.

Unsuitable soil material must be removed and buried so that it does not adversely affect water quality or plant growth. These materials must be disposed of in a manner that minimizes the potential for seepage, which can pollute surface and groundwater. Materials containing heavy metals must be buried to a depth below the root zone, or

suitable kinds and amounts of soil amendments must be added.

The generation of dust shall be controlled as needed during earthmoving activities.

Overhanging rocks and walls that are to be covered shall be sloped to  $\frac{1}{2}$  horizontal to 1 vertical slope before the soil is placed against the wall, unless a flatter slope is needed for stability. Unless otherwise specified, fill material shall be spread in successive layers not more than 2 feet (0.6 m) thick.

**Removal and Placement of Material for Final Cover.** Any soil material on the site that is suitable for the intended final use shall be salvaged, stockpiled and protected for use as final cover material.

The reconstructed soil must meet the requirements for the specified land use on at least 80 percent of the area. The rest of the area must be in such a condition that it can be stabilized.

The salvaged material and other suitable materials must be spread over the graded areas to the depth specified in the reclamation plan. The final slope must permit application of needed conservation and management practices to keep soil losses within planned permissible levels. If settlement is likely to interfere with the planned use of the land, surface drainage or water disposal, allowances must be made for the expected settlement during final grading.

Temporary seeding, mulching, water disposal and similar measures to help control erosion shall be used as necessary.

**Water Disposal.** The need for a water disposal system shall be carefully analyzed, and if needed, it shall be included in the design. The system must be intensive enough to control erosion during and after stabilization. If any practices are to be removed after vegetation is established, provisions must be made to promptly stabilize all disturbed areas. Water disposal systems suitable for intensively farmed cropland are usually required for mined land reclamation and may be used as a guide in the absence of local experience.

**Establishment of Vegetation.** Plant materials selected for establishment shall be adapted to the site conditions.

Apply soil amendments and plant nutrients to achieve the physical or chemical soil conditions suitable to support plant growth.

Seedbed preparation, seeding rates, dates, depths, and planting methods shall be consistent with approved local criteria.

Install additional structural measures needed, such as terraces, lined waterways and/or grade stabilization structures.

**Restoration of Borrow Area.** If cover material is taken from outside the reclamation site, the borrow area must be graded and reshaped to insure proper drainage and be revegetated to control erosion.

If the cover material is taken from adjacent land, the topsoil from the borrow area must be stockpiled separately and replaced after the borrow area is restored for its intended purpose.

If the borrow area is prime farmland, the A and B horizons (or the B and C horizons if applicable) must be removed and stockpiled separately by horizon and then replaced on the borrow area in natural sequence. The combined thickness of the replaced horizons shall be adequate to restore the original soil productivity. Treatment of the borrow area shall meet the requirements of Land Reconstruction, Currently Mined Land (544).

#### **Additional Criteria to Maintain or Improve the Visual Quality of the Landscape**

The appearance of the reclaimed site must be in accordance with standards for maintaining and improving the visual quality of the landscape and must be compatible with the adjacent landscape. Areas of high public visibility or those offering direct or indirect human benefits shall be evaluated and considered in landscape resource management planning and design. Soil piles and borrow areas shall be shaped to blend with the adjacent landscape as much as possible.

### **Additional Criteria to Protect Public Health, Safety and General Welfare**

Provisions must be made to reduce potential safety hazards and erosion and water pollution problems in areas that have high walls and landslides. Treatment shall meet or exceed the requirements of NRCS standards for Land Reclamation, Landslide Treatment (453) and Land Reclamation, Highwall Treatment (456) as appropriate.

### **Additional Criteria to Improve Soil Quality and Sequester Carbon**

Establish plant species that will produce the greatest quantity of above and below ground biomass on the site.

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

Developing a detailed soil survey of the area to be reclaimed and the proposed borrow area to identify the types and extent of soil materials.

Consider the need for access roads that would facilitate final reclamation activities and operation and maintenance.

Reclamation has great potential for increasing or improving wildlife habitat in the reclaimed area. Avoid monocultures when developing vegetative specifications.

Limit or stop earth-moving activities when wind direction and velocity could allow particulate matter to impair visibility on roads downwind from the construction area.

Planting reclaimed areas to perennial vegetation that will sequester carbon.

The use of organic materials such as manure, compost, mulch or sewage sludge can contribute to the success of vegetative establishment and the long-term success of the planting. It also can increase the organic matter content of the soil.

Consider the impact on cultural resources during planning, installation and maintenance. This practice should be in compliance with 420GM Part 401 concerning cultural resources.

### **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Plans and specifications for reconstructing abandoned mined land shall be in keeping with this standard and shall describe the requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose.

Plans shall include provisions for the disposal of toxic materials that may be uncovered as a result of the earth moving and reclamation activities.

A reclamation plan must be developed for each site. The plan shall specify the required procedures for conducting reclamation and reconstruction activities.

### **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

An O&M plan shall be prepared that provides specific details concerning maintenance and operation of conservation practices identified in the reclamation plan. The maintenance and operation plan shall specify procedures for:

- Filling areas where settlement may adversely affect drainage and land use.
- Promptly repairing and revegetating bare spots, eroded areas, areas of excessive settlement, and other areas on which the initial attempt to establish vegetation was not successful.
- Adding soil amendments to soils that cannot support adequate vegetation or replacing them with suitable soil material.
- Maintaining access roads.
- Keeping drainage structures and channels clean and functional.
- Applying fertilizer and lime.
- Controlling weeds.
- Using proper grazing practices.
- Controlling vehicular traffic.

### **REFERENCES**

Soil Survey Division Staff. 1993. Soil survey manual. Pp. 90-92. Soil Conservation Service. U.S. Department of Agriculture Handbook 18.

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292, "Influence of Moisture on Erodibility of  
Soil by Wind".